

Running Head: IMPROVING INTERNAL DEPARTMENT COMMUNICATIONS

Improving Internal Department Communications

Gary L. McQueen

Sandy Fire District, Sandy, Oregon

Certification Statement

I hereby certify that this paper constitutes my own product, that where the language of others is set forth, quotation marks so indicate, and that appropriate credit is given where I have used the language, ideas, expressions, or writings of another.

Signed:_____

Abstract

The problem was that inadequate communications within the fire department in Sandy, Oregon lead to concerns of possible morale issues. In a recent survey of department members, even though most members answered that they felt well informed about the activities of the district, many indicated that to some degree, they were not. This indicated an area of, and opportunities for, improvement.

Descriptive research methodologies were used to determine what types of organizational communications are most relied upon; what types of communications efforts would improve the situation; what responsibilities do employees of organizations have in communications efforts; and how can improvements in communications be measured?

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the status of fire service communication efforts in order to make recommendations to improve communications. Comprehensive literature review, personal interviews, and an on-line survey were used to collect the data for this applied research project.

Results revealed that fire agencies commonly rely on several methods for communication, including: staff meetings, internal memos, duty chief rounds, face to face contact, word of mouth and rumors. Recommendations to improve communications include increasing face to face communications, making sure that members are clear about the mission, vision and values, establishing a communications focus group, among several other suggestions.

All employees have a level of responsibility to participate in communications, the administration has the responsibility to make information and methods available, and organizations can take steps to measure the effectiveness of communication efforts by focused surveys, snap polls, and by conducting interviews.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Certification Statement..... | 2 |
| Abstract..... | 3 |
| Table of Contents..... | 4 |
| Introduction..... | 5 |
| Background and Significance..... | 5 |
| Literature Review..... | 8 |
| Procedures..... | 20 |
| Results..... | 22 |
| Table 1: Survey question 4 responses | 25 |
| Table 2: Survey question 6 responses..... | 27 |
| Table 3: Off-duty, non-emergency communications methods..... | 30 |
| Table 4: Employee responsibility for communication efforts..... | 31 |
| Discussion..... | 37 |
| Recommendations..... | 50 |
| Reference List..... | 53 |
| Appendix A (On-line survey document)..... | 55 |
| Appendix B (Survey Respondents)..... | 66 |
| Appendix C (Sandy Fire District internal survey – communication results only)..... | 70 |

Introduction

In any organization, effective communication is important for its success. Making sure that members are aware of what is going on operationally as well as communicating the department's goals, mission, vision and values are key components to accomplishing department goals and maintaining positive morale.

The problem is that inadequate communication within the Sandy Fire District (SFD) in Sandy, Oregon has lead to concerns of possible morale issues. In a recent survey of department members, even though 61% of members answered that they felt well informed about the activities of the district, 38% indicated that to some degree, they were not. And 51% of SFD members disagreed that they were well informed about goals and objectives set by SFD leadership and board. This indicates an area of, and opportunities for, improvement with internal communication efforts.

The purpose of this applied research project (ARP) is to make recommendations to improve internal communications and develop a foundation for a course of actions to address morale issues at Sandy Fire District (SFD).

This ARP will use descriptive research methodologies to determine what types of organizational communications are most relied upon; what types of communications efforts would improve the situation; what responsibilities do employees of organizations have in communications efforts; and how can improvements in communications be measured?

Background and Significance

Sandy, Oregon lies in the western foothills of Mt. Hood and the Cascade Mountain range east of Portland, Oregon. Its close proximity to larger cities, such as Portland and Gresham, make it primarily a rural/residential community with light industry located in small industrial-

zoned areas. Sandy lies within Clackamas County and the county seat is located in Oregon City; the end of the Oregon Trail.

SFD is a combination fire department and rural fire district that protects 77 square miles with a population of just over 18,100 residents, based on an estimate from Kelly Neumeier (personal communication, February 23, 2010) at Clackamas County Geographical Information Services. The main station is staffed 24 hours a day with career and volunteer members, and two sub-stations rely on volunteer and call-back career members for staffing.

Each fire station has a fax machine and a memo board but high speed internet is only available at the main station. Written memorandums are posted along with safety meeting minutes, training announcements, and other fire service related information primarily at the main station, but safety committee information is posted at all locations. SFD is staffed with 16 career and 45 volunteer personnel who answer approximately 1800 alarms a year, with units from the main station responding on every alarm. SFD is governed by an elected Board of Directors, a separate government from the City of Sandy, and its origin dates back to 1912. Like nearly every fire department in the region, SFD enjoys an excellent reputation for providing proactive public service, cost-effective operations, and very good public support.

Being a combination department, SFD relies on a diverse work-force with varying levels of activity, availability, and accessibility. Career members are assigned to the main station during their assigned shifts but volunteers and board members might not visit their stations unless they are there for an alarm, a meeting, or for training. Six career members work a three-platoon shift system of 24 hours on and 48 hours off. Some volunteer members are local residents and some live in the greater Portland area, several miles away. All members are assigned a voice pager and an alpha-numeric pager for notifications, and the district maintains cell phone and e-mail

contacts of members to send out announcements. Some members receive alarm notification as a text message on their personal cell phones, if they wish.

Recently, members have verbally expressed concerns to department leaders about a lack of internal communications and, to a certain extent, morale issues. Members have specifically mentioned a lack of communication throughout the chain of command, and they have felt that, among other things, the mission, vision and values of the organization have not been well communicated from department leaders.

Facing concerns that this issue could be causing deterioration of morale, loss of active volunteer members, and could affect the ability for SFD to maintain adequate public service, the fire chief and board of directors decided to commission the services of an independent consultant. The result was a confidential on-line survey of all department members to learn if there was a basis in fact for these concerns and, if so, to engage the membership to suggest solutions. Partial survey results revealed that some members of the organization feel well informed about fire district business while others do not. This may indicate a problem, or the perception of a problem, with communications. This organizational survey led to a re-write process of the mission, vision and values of SFD.

The focus of this ARP is on generally improving internal communications in the department, not the actual process of re-writing the department's mission, vision, and values. However, it should be noted that a collaborative process of writing or re-writing those items is a communication process of its own, which can provide the opportunity to communicate and/or open the door for improved communications.

The National Fire Academy (NFA) emphasizes the importance of communications throughout the curriculum of the Executive Fire Officer (EFO) course. The researcher attended

the Executive Leadership (EL) course at the NFA in Emmitsburg, Maryland in May of 2009.

This ARP is specifically related to the EL course skill/action areas: the ability to communicate, use of feedback, ability to influence, ability to build teams and networks, ability to negotiate, mediate, and promote consensus, and the use of power. (NFA, 2005)

This research relates to United States Fire Administration (USFA) operational objective 4: to improve the fire and emergency services' professional status, strategy A, develop leadership skills through training for management and technical disciplines. (USFA, 2009) The new USFA objectives are also addressed in the Executive Fire Officer Program Operational Policies and Procedures. (NFA, 2009) The relationship between this ARP and the USFA objective is that internal communications can influence the ability of a fire department to be effective with employee relationships, community involvement, the reputation of the department in the community, and to complete its mission.

Literature Review

Strategic Communications Management (SCM, 2009) interviewed Neil Jenkins, European communications manager for Coca-Cola Enterprises (CCE), the exclusive bottler of Coca-Cola products in Great Britain, France, Benelux and Monaco. When asked what the most effective communication channels are at CCE, he gave this response:

Face-to-face is still hard to beat. There's nothing like the buzz of a great conference or event, and it's a vital operational channel for thousands of our employees who work in manufacturing or field roles where they're not online regularly. (¶ 5)

An important point, according to Jenkins, is making sure that line managers are effective communicators. In this way they can understand business goals to make them relevant for their teams. This "is the holy grail of most internal communicators." (¶ 5)

Cochran (2006) discussed the positive effect that meetings have on an organization. They “provide the irreplaceable value of oral communications with key fire department and fire service leaders.” (p. 23) Meetings provide the opportunity to discuss operational and strategic goals. He also stressed the importance of mid-level chief officers receiving information first hand because of their crucial role in the mission of the organization.

Technology offers communication tools that enable meetings to occur even when people are in remote locations or another part of the world. Meetings provide the leader with feedback on organizational performance and gives information to help anticipate problems and perhaps prevent their occurrence. Another technique suggested by Cochran is referred to as leadership by walking around. This impromptu activity allows the chief to directly observe performance which can be helpful to determine the need for corrective action or revision of policies.

Some colleges use a Learning Management System (LMS), sometimes referred to as a blackboard. This allows for the instructor and the college to post on-line information for class participants, and for the students to access learning and testing materials, take exams, and receive feedback from the instructor. A Content Management Systems (CMS) is a method for many people to post information, from any location they may be at in the world. This information can be accessed by anyone with permission to use the site. elearningpost (sic) (2010) describes how LMS and CMS work.

Merriam-Webster (2010) defines communication as a process that is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or behavior, and an exchange of information. Kumuyi, (2010) offered several tips on communication. Communication is an exchange that is not complete unless a response is received. When communicating, you should expect feedback, but the leader must allow for it in this manner. First, you have to desire

feedback by letting people know you respect and cherish their feelings and views. Next, you should demand feedback. This can be accomplished simply by asking people their opinions. And finally, you must show how you genuinely value others' opinions by listening. When listening, you should keep an open mind and don't interrupt the person talking to you; just listen.

Poor communication can cause disintegration of an organization. Better persuasion and communication of the vision results from face to face methods rather than electronic messages or even the telephone. A communication failure can cause a lack of cohesion that will hinder motivation. According to Kumuyi, "Workers will work for the pay: but they would be unwilling to go the extra mile to achieve anything extraordinary for the organization." (p.410)

However, due to their actual experiences, some leaders may not agree that good communication always results in successful persuasion. Sometimes good communication can fail to produce that result. Some people will shrug off the effort to be persuaded but most will succumb to it. Kumuyi urged leaders to examine the message they wish to deliver by making it right in content and context which are factors that control message delivery. In other words you should understand how to deliver the message so that the audience receives it, understands it, and reacts without feeling dehumanized.

Eblin (2006) stated that he believes effective communication is both strategic and intentional. He wants those he is coaching to first consider "what is the key idea that those they are communicating with should take from the communication." (p. 62) Further, how do they want the audience to feel as a result of the communication? And finally, what action do they want the audience to take based on that feeling? Eblin also mentions that comments made by an executive in an organization can be taken out of context. Some executives feel that the organization may take their comments too literally. And, executives must be careful what they

say because it will be quoted and used actively in the organization. He also wrote that sometimes it can be easier to communicate when things are a bit more relaxed. If communications are less formal, better dialogue can occur.

Garcia (2009) discussed the impact of how decisions are communicated to the organization. He describes three types of decisions, which if not communicated effectively, can lead to de-motivation of employees.

- Administrative decisions - made solely by administration.
- Participative decisions - made by administration after legitimately asking for input.
- Committee-based decisions - when the process and outcome is completely turned over to a committee.

When communicating administrative decisions, it should be made clear when the time for any input is past. And unless it is confidential, the reason for the decision should be shared. Most leaders tend to use this method sparingly unless it's a safety issue or necessary for expedience, but not convenience. When making participative decisions, the person or persons who are supplying information need to know that they will research options, discuss pros and cons, and that the leader has the right to select any option. With committee based decisions, leaders need to make sure they are willing to allow the group to do what is asked of them, and then the leader needs to follow through as promised in order not to violate the trust of the group.

Gerling (2009) suggests that respect, trust, and open honest communications are among the most common values stated by fire departments. These values “are a call to achieve higher morale, a happier, more creative culture.” (p. 50) Fearless and open communication is needed.

Some people may be afraid to communicate openly because they feel that their opinions and concerns could be ridiculed or ignored. Some organizations might need specialized

processes to open up communications. This could include anonymous surveys, possibly conducted by a third-party. This method can allow members to express their concerns and opinions without fear. Regular and structured meetings with open communications can help diagnose the problems in an organization.

O'Neil (2008) conducted a focused study on a world-wide company with just under 100,000 employees, and with its own communications division. The results of their recent global company-wide communication survey indicate that timely, complete, and accurate corporate communication and face-to-face managerial communication can help to secure employee action in favor of company goals. O'Neil's results point to the success of improving communications within that company by improving employee knowledge and use of their intra-net. The study found that face-to-face communications was still very valuable and in some cases more effective in communicating organizational goals and strategies.

After recently going through a period of self-assessment on how well their communication efforts had been working, Chief Jay Tappan (personal communication, January 25, 2010) of Columbia River Fire & Rescue in Oregon offered this advice regarding communication during tough times, "We found that we really needed to do a better job of getting things out there. Any time an organization is under financial stress, communicating very clearly becomes a top priority." Chief Tappan was interviewed because his agency, like many others, has been dealing with some extreme budget reductions lately, making this a timely issue.

Kouzes & Pozner (2010) also emphasize that leaders should practice positive communications. Constituents look for leaders who are enthusiastic and genuine about others abilities, strengthen people's will and are optimistic about the future. In spite of obstacles and setbacks, constituents want leaders to remain passionate. With regard to communicating vision, it

is recommended that leaders communicate a brief speech about the “ideal and unique image of the future for yourself and for your organization.” (p. 366) This should include what you personally aspire to create, what is unique about your hopes, dreams and aspirations, what the vision looks like ten to fifteen years into the future, what images come to mind when thinking about the future, and how does the vision serve the common good.

NFA (2005) addresses communication in terms of the ability to communicate, influence, build teams and networks, negotiate, mediate, and promote consensus and use of power. (pp. 1-4 - 1-5) Activities of leadership involve aligning people. Communicating by word creates a connection with goals and values of others who are participating in achieving a desired outcome. (p. 9-3)

From a list of transformational leadership behaviors, NFA (2005) also teaches that communications leadership involves:

- Paying close attention to what others say
- Communicating a clear sense of priorities
- Grabbing people’s attention
- Focusing on the important issue in a discussion
- Listening for feelings as well as ideas
- The ability to get complicated ideas across clearly. (p. 3-10)

Eblin (2006) mentions the concept of the presence of a leader while communicating in person. If the leader is positive and optimistic, those around them are more likely to reflect that presence. Eblin studied work by University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) professor Albert Mehrabian about how audiences process spoken information. Mehrabian concluded that there are three factors and listed the corresponding impact of the presentation the audience:

- The content of the presentation – 55% of the impact
- The speaker's body language – 33% of the impact
- The speaker's tone of voice – 7% of the impact (p.82)

According to Eblin, the implications for an executive leader and communicator are clear:

To communicate what you intend to communicate, you have to manage your presence at least as much as the content of your message. If you want people to be excited about the future, then your tone of voice and body language have to project excitement. (p.82)

The Spokane Fire Department (2007), in Washington State, lists communication improvements as goal number 1 in its strategic plan “To further develop communications with the community, employees and policy makers.” (p.2) Among objectives listed related to this ARP are to enhance their website by adding direct contact capability to key fire department staff and enhancing the fire department portal to include a method for employees to share ideas.

The Monterey Park Fire Department (MPFD, 2008) also lists the following objectives in their strategic plan.

- Produce a calendar that includes all events and training and activities
- Continue morning briefings, including conference calling to include a wider audience
- Increase the fire chief's direct communication with department personnel by initiating individual meetings, participate in the morning briefing when possible, send out a monthly “Chief's Email” for direct communication about issues as well as changes in policies and procedures
- Continue to honor the chain of command
- Work to include civilian staff in the communication loop

Mount Lebanon Fire Department (MLFD, 2009) added these items to their strategic plan:

- Clarify and enforce the proper chain of command
- Explore, evaluate, and implement a variety of communications tools that encourage open expression of issues, concerns, and suggestions
- Identify an official forum for the submission and consideration of new ideas
- Discuss training and policy/procedure changes at drills and meetings
- Post official department information in a central location
- Weekly platoon meetings with the fire chief
- Implement written monthly platoon reports
- Post training notices in a more public location (p.16)

In the United Kingdom the Humberside Fire Authority (HFA, 2009) published a draft Corporate Communications Strategy that identified specific areas of responsibility for staff members. Then term corporate communications describes the activities undertaken to communicate internally and externally. Their strategy contains a specific section that identifies who is responsible for what, in terms of internal communications:

Senior managers are responsible to:

- Endorse, promote, and support communications activity at the highest level
- Agree on key messages
- Represent the service at external partnership and regulatory bodies
- Promote the successes and good practices of the organization
- Lead the service with clear, consistent, and accessible communication

All managers have a responsibility to:

- Make sure that all staff receive internal communications to support the performance of the organization

- Encourage staff to participate in consultations and provide feedback
- Uphold and share the vision and priorities of the Service
- Prioritize communications to staff, particularly during any time of change
- Monitor the use of internal communication methods within their area of responsibility

All staff members have a responsibility to:

- Access appropriate information and seek clarification if they do not understand any communication. (pp. 8 – 10)

As an organization, there are several other responsibilities listed, such as establishment of a communications team for any questions with regard to communications and marketing, establish corporate identity and branding guidelines on how to use their service brand or logo, oversee and improve the corporate informational portal, make sure members are informed and engaged with the priorities of the department, formalize briefings to ensure consistent information and use internal communications methods to celebrate success and achievements. HFA also developed a baseline survey to be conducted on a regular basis that will be used to measure how satisfied members are with regard to internal communications.

Eblin (2006) discussed efforts that subordinates can use to communicate with executives. He stated that senior executives tend to have less time to communicate because they have an increasing need to communicate with more people. He emphasizes that as a subordinate, even at an executive level, you should not wait for your boss to tell you what information they want you to provide, and how often they want it. You should ask them. You should also determine what communications methods your boss wants you to use, then use them consistently. Does your boss want to communicate by e-mail, voice mail, conference calls, or face to face? Do they want brief summaries or more details?

The amount of communications that an executive level boss receives can be very high, therefore a simple way of presenting information might make it easier for the executive to process the volume of communications. Research by Eblin discovered a communications framework used by a professor at the University of Michigan, which is built on three simple open-ended questions that can lead to better clarity and understanding of issues and expectations, as well as follow-up:

- What? What issue needs to be addressed?
- So what? What makes this worthy of consideration?
- Now what? What needs to be done? What action or support do you need? What are the benchmarks your boss wants you to track? (p.69)

Eblin (2006) also addressed the topic of speaking for the work. Many managers may believe that their successes will speak for themselves and be noticed. At lower levels in an organization this may be the case, but the truth is that many senior executives may be too busy to always notice successes unless they are pointed out to them. “It is important to remember that at the next level, the work doesn’t speak for itself; you have to speak for the work.” (p.71)

It is also important to remember that you are speaking for the work of your team, not yourself. Avoiding bragging can prevent being turned off by senior executives as well as subordinates. When your subordinates or their team is successful it is your responsibility to speak for their successes. Your personal work will then speak for itself. If your team is successful, the success will be attributed to you without you having to claim it for yourself.

Coffman (2004) wrote on the topic of a strategic communications audit (SCA), which is a formal or informal, systematic assessment of an organization’s capacity for, or performance of, vital communications practices. It is used to determine what efforts are working well, what are

not, and what could work better with changes in practices. A SCA can be performed internally, or by an outside consultant. Advantages of conducting a SCA internally can include cost savings as well as the actual communications process that can occur as a result of performing the audit in-house. Use of an outside consultant may be advantageous because of time savings and the expertise that a consultant can bring to the table.

The first step of a SCA is to learn what the organization's practices are. There are sixteen essential strategic communications practices divided into three categories:

Strategy – Includes the core tasks of communications planning and strategy development.

- Identify the vision – aligned with but distinct from the mission
- Choose goals and outcomes – well defined, measureable, guide the plan of action
- Select target audiences – specific and includes key individuals
- Develop messages – specific, clear, persuasive, reflect values, course of action
- Identify credible messengers – those seen as credible by the organization
- Choose communications methods and outlets – available in air and on the ground
- Scan the context and competition – risks and variables are identified and factored in

Implementation – Includes practices most common to an organization with an active communications function.

- Develop effective materials – attractive and varied formats for maximum exposure
- Build valuable partnerships – link with stakeholders who can align and carry the message
- Train messengers – messengers who are trained in key messages and consistent delivery
- Conduct steady outreach – outreach through many outlets is regular and sustained
- Monitor and evaluate – activities and outcomes for accountability and improvement

Support and alignment – Includes non-communications-specific practices within the organization

that help to ensure the communications function is successful. (p. 2)

- Support communications at the leadership level – an integral part of organizational success
- Earmark sufficient resources – dedicated resources for communications practices
- Integrate communications throughout the organization – part of every project or strategy
- Involve staff at all levels – not isolated – all staff have knowledge and participation (p. 3)

O'Neil (2008) studied and discussed measurement of success with communications. The company in her focused study sought to make sure the employees learned about and embraced a specific body of knowledge that the organization deemed important, communicated it using their intra-net, and then measured the outcomes of the improved communications. They cited the use of three tools to measure effectiveness:

- Employee survey
- Focus groups
- One-on-one interviews to determine if the body of knowledge was learned and retained.

In summary, the literature review found several relevant sources that provided information to partially answer the research questions. A survey of fire agencies is needed to determine current practices in the fire service and provide additional data. The data that was researched supports the idea that communications issues are not unique to the fire service, or any industry. The researcher was not surprised that many methods exist to help improve communication issues, specifically the issue with SFD, and that most of the technical practices, such as audits, would have been developed outside of the fire service. The data confirmed that

communications issues at SFD also exist in other industries, and some communication practices by used currently SFD are also common practices by other agencies and private industry.

Procedures

In order to answer each of the four research questions, literature review began at the Learning Resource Center (LRC) located at the NFA in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Several books, journals, on-line sources, and EFO research papers were reviewed to evaluate relevant content. At that time, there were no EFO research papers on file specifically on the topic of improving internal department communications. Some material came from the Executive Leadership (EL) Student Manual.

As additional sources, the researcher used several journals and books that were already in his possession, as well as several on-line sources using search terms such as communications audit and fire department strategic plan communication. Personal communications were conducted by phone, e-mail and in-person in order to gain the personal ideas, data, and opinions of four local public officials, which included a city manager, a school superintendant, a geographical information specialist, and a fire chief. These contacts are listed in-text and in Appendix B.

To find the correct location of the MPFD (2008) on-line source, one must scroll approximately half way down the home page and click on the Fire Department Strategic Plan link to reach the source used in this ARP. Also, the source for the SCM Articles (2009) must be reached by scrolling down the page from the link given in the Reference section to reach the link titled Coca-Cola Enterprises' Vision for Engagement.

Additional research was conducted by means of an on-line survey. 125 members of the fire service were asked by e-mail to participate in the survey and 92 responses were received,

yielding a return exceeding 73%. The survey was designed to provide additional data to answer all four research questions. The survey tool was developed to evaluate responses from a variety of fire service agencies and even included responses from other local and state government officials including a police department and a 911 center. It was sent to several fire officials in the State of Oregon, as well as several EFO students and graduates, in like and unlike organizations, including New Zealand and Hong Kong.

EFO program instructors and evaluators have cautioned students about sending survey requests to other EFO students because they might not be a fair or accurate representation of departments similar to that of the researcher. In this case, the researcher did not send requests exclusively to other EFO students and he felt that information from a variety of types of agencies would be valuable. Several local contacts are former or current EFO students.

The purpose of this ARP is to improve internal communications, and as of the date of the researcher's attendance of his EL class at the NFA, no EFO research papers specifically on the topic of improving internal communications were found to be on file in the LRC. The researcher wished to gain information from more than just like-sized or structured fire agencies to his because of the variety of possible solutions to gain from that effort. The researcher felt that his organization, and perhaps future readers, could benefit from information gained from varied sources.

The survey questions consisted of open-ended, forced choice, and multiple choice questions. Most requests were sent to fire officers, especially chief ranks. Respondents were very cooperative and this survey received 92 responses after being open on SurveyMonkey for three weeks. The reason for ending the survey after 92 responses was to allow for sufficient time to analyze the results. The researcher purchased a month-to-month membership to SurveyMonkey

which allowed for the survey results to be downloaded, analyzed and even shared with respondents after the survey was closed. Following the active survey period, a full analysis of the data was conducted using tools provided by SurveyMonkey as well as manually tallying data.

Two limitations are noted. First, the researcher did not ask for each survey respondent to provide their name. Several did when asked to provide it if they wanted a copy of the survey results. Appendix B lists these respondents in addition to departments that the researcher sent requests by e-mail to participate. SurveyMonkey lists the internet provider number for the contact for each respondent but that number is not able to confirm the exact respondent, just the fact that they completed the survey. Second, writing open-ended survey questions was a necessary step for this ARP, but required significant time to compare data and enter it into tables or paragraphs.

Results

The researcher located several sources of information and data to answer to the four research questions. In March of 2009 SFD conducted an internal survey to inquire about concerns regarding communication and leadership. The board of directors commissioned Emergency Services Consulting, Inc. (ESCI) to write and conduct the anonymous survey. It was the topic of communication in that employee survey that led to this ARP.

The results of that survey that related to communications were that 61% of members felt well informed about activities at SFD and 51% disagreed that they were well informed about goals and objectives set by SFD leadership and board. 43% agreed that open communication was maintained to and from senior leadership (chief, deputy chief) and the company officers. 60% agreed that communication is maintained to and from the respondent and the immediate supervisor. 64% agreed that their opinions are important to leadership and 66% agreed that member concerns and criticism of the fire district are responded to in a professional manner.

28% of the membership relies on other members of SFD as the primary source of information about the district.

The leading suggestions given for what SFD should be doing more of were: follow-up/follow through with regard to questions, suggestions, and concerns, following chain of command for information and communication, and involve all members (volunteers and personnel) in communication processes. These results are shown in Appendix C.

The 11-question survey developed by the researcher for this ARP was designed to help answer the four research questions and a complete copy of survey results is in Appendix A. The first survey question was designed to determine types of departments being polled. Of the 92 responses 48.9% (n = 45) were in fully career departments, 47.8% (n = 44) belonged to combination departments, just over 1% difference. 2.2% (n = 2) represented all volunteer departments, and 1.1% (n = 1) checked “other” without specifically identifying the type.

The second question asked the rank of the respondent. 68.5% (n = 63) were chiefs or executive level officers, 19.6% (n = 18) were battalion or division chiefs or mid-level managers, 10.9% (n = 10) were company officers or front line supervisors and 1.1% (n = 1) was a firefighter or administrative level member. This question was asked simply to see the ranks of those answered the survey, which could be of significance when analyzing and making assumptions based on the responses given. Most respondents were chief or executive level officers.

The specific answers to research question one, what types of communications are most relied upon are: staff meetings, internal memorandums, face to face methods, duty chief rounds, and word of mouth information from other members. Research confirmed that face to face methods usually are the most effective ways to communicate. Electronic forms of

communication can be very efficient and fast but come at some risk, including misunderstanding the content or context of the message.

Survey question 3 was developed to answer research question one. Respondents were asked to place 8 choices into 5 categories ranging from completely agree to completely disagree. The leading responses for each category is as follows: 52% mostly agreed that staff meetings were most relied upon, 50% mostly agreed that internal memos were, 48.9% mostly agreed that face to face methods were, 42.2% mostly agreed that duty chief rounds were, and 38.6% mostly agreed that word of mouth is relied upon. 34.5% somewhat agreed that the rumor mill was relied on, 31.6% completely disagreed that an internal newsletter was, and 41% completely disagreed that the local news paper was relied upon.

The majority of respondents did not indicate that they completely agreed that any of the communication choices listed were most relied upon. Other open-ended responses included the following: E-mail (n = 14), Website (n = 2). Daily log, paging, intranet, TV and direct mail received one response each.

Survey question 4 asked respondents to list up to four internal communications methods that they believed would be the most effective in terms of reaching the intended audience. The question was asked in an open-question format without forced choices, requiring manual comparison of the answers because the researcher did not want to limit responses to constrained choices.

Table 1 lists these responses:

Table 1

Survey Question 4 Responses

| Method | Choice 1 | Choice 2 | Choice 3 | Choice 4 | Total |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Face to face | 30 | 15 | 13 | 12 | 70 |
| Staff meeting | 14 | 21 | 18 | 17 | 70 |
| E-mail | 29 | 12 | 11 | 6 | 65 |
| Memo | 11 | 19 | 18 | 7 | 55 |
| Newsletter | 10 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 30 |
| Video/CCTV | 4 | 2 | 2 | - | 8 |
| Pager | 2 | 3 | - | 2 | 7 |
| Website | - | 2 | 1 | 4 | 7 |
| Phone | - | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |

The total number of responses in the first column exceeds the 92 total survey responses received because some comments consisted of multiple answers. The top four responses were face to face and staff meetings, each receiving 70 hits, with memo's and e-mail following closely behind at 65 and 58 responses respectively. Text messaging and direct mail received two responses each and conference call and town meeting received one response each. Several of the responses were unique and not listed specifically in Table 1, but were placed in the above general categories when possible. These included: staff actually making decisions, use and enforcement of the chain of command, station crew meetings, station visits by the chief, informal coffee table meetings, bi-monthly or quarterly staff or officer meetings, effective use of roll calls and staff meetings, use of activities calendars, and monthly labor/management meetings. Most of these are face-to-face meetings.

The researcher was not only interested in specific methods or mediums relating to communications, but also in communications skills. The data from Kumuyi (2006) indicating that better persuasion and communication of the vision of an organization results from face to face communication, and from Cochran (2006) discussing the value of oral communications with key fire department and fire service leaders, contributes to the answer to research question 1. Cochran also mentioned the value gained by the chief actually visiting other worksites, stations, etc. which also provides an opportunity for face to face discussions with all ranks. O'Neil (2008) concluded in part that face to face communication is more effective in communicating organizational goals and strategies, even in large world-wide companies.

The specific answer to research question 2, what types of communication efforts would improve the situation, are as follows: e-mails, staff meetings, newsletters and memorandums, and face to face. Communication paths should be set up formally and used as intended by the organization. Leaders should strive for honesty and clarity when communicating. Sensitive communications should almost always be conducted face to face. The use of communication focus groups or committees can help to develop communication techniques and practices. Follow up to communications are very important to make sure that messages were delivered and that situations or concerns were dealt with.

To answer research question 2, the following data was studied. Survey question 5 asked if any individuals had observed improvements in communications following the addition of any specific communications methods. 58.7% (n = 54) stated they had while 41.3% (n = 38) answered that they had not. The follow-up question, survey question 6, asked them to list up to four methods used and is represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Survey Question 6 Responses

| Method | Choice 1 | Choice 2 | Choice 3 | Choice 4 | Totals |
|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------|
| E-mail | 9 | 11 | 7 | 3 | 30 |
| Staff meeting | 16 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 30 |
| Face to face | 6 | 1 | 2 | - | 9 |
| Newsletter | 4 | 4 | - | 1 | 9 |
| Memo | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| Station visits | 2 | 3 | - | - | 5 |
| Website posting | 1 | - | 2 | 1 | 4 |

E-mails and staff meetings, receiving 30 responses each, were the leading choices for methods that had resulted in improved communications in organizations. Face to face methods (n = 9), newsletters (n = 9), and memos (n = 8) received significantly fewer responses. Station visits by the chief or chief officers was mentioned only five times. The use of an intra-net, bulletin board postings, conference calling, and use of surveys received two responses each. Operating policies or guidelines, direct mail, text messaging, and paging received one response each.

Eblin (2006) stated that those who report to senior executives should develop a relationship with them and ask them what kind of communication methods their boss wants them to use. This can improve communications by establishing clear expectations. SCM (2009) learned from Coca-Cola that face to face communication is a method that is hard to improve on.

Email has advantages of speed and simplicity; however one survey respondent indicated that their department has become communication-redundant because of e-mail. In that

organization, the same messages were being delivered in multiple ways from multiple people, which can cause people to ignore the communication.

Eblin (2006) discovered a simple communications framework based on three open-ended Questions: what: what issue needs to be addressed, so what: what makes this worthy or consideration, and now what: what needs to be done. This framework can lead to better clarity and understanding of messages. When we communicate, we should consider the key idea that we want others to receive, how we want the audience to feel as a result, and what is the desired action that we want the audience to take. Sometimes it can be easier to communicate when things are less formal because there can be better dialogue.

Garcia (2009) discussed how decisions are communicated to the organization. The decision making process should be made clear to the organization. Some administrative decisions will be made without input and some can be more of a participative nature. When asking for input, it should be made clear when the time for that input is over. Committee decisions need to be left to the committee or trust issues will cause problems for the leader.

Gerling (2009) stated that respect, trust and open honest communications are among the most common values listed by fire departments and that regular meetings can help diagnose problems in an organization. Eblin (2006) discussed the impact of a spoken presentation on an audience. Only 55% of the impact comes from the content and 33% comes from the speaker's body language. Speakers need to manage their presence nearly as much as the content of the message. Kouzes & Pozner (2010) stated that members of the organization will look toward a leader who is enthusiastic and optimistic about the future. A positive attitude and messages will help.

NFA (2005), while addressing use of power, suggests that the presenter can be effective if he or she is honest and does their best to pay attention to what others are saying, attempts to communicate clear priorities, gets people's attention, focuses on important issue in a discussion, listens for feelings and ideas, and has the ability to get complicated ideas across clearly.

Survey question 7 asked about specific types of communications that agencies use to reach staffed or un-staffed remote stations. Electronic mail led at 73.9% (n = 68), personal visits received 67.4% (n = 62), telephone calls were at 58.7% (n = 54), and posted memorandums received a response of 47.8% (n = 44). In descending order, the remaining responses received lesser responses but are being used: faxes, conference calls, electronic bulletin boards, closed circuit or satellite television, and web sources such as Skype. 16.3% (n = 15) replied "not applicable."

Other responses to question 7 included: Interactive video briefings, visits and staff meetings, department intranet/website, use of Blackberry devices, alpha-numeric paging, video conferencing, video teleconferencing, staff meetings – weekly or monthly. Some of these choices fit into the categories listed in the previous paragraph.

Question 8 asked about reaching members while off-duty or otherwise readily available. The two leading responses were e-mails, at 81.5% and telephone calls at 62%. Use of pagers was listed at 35.9%. This question was asked simply to determine to what extent organizations go to communicate with members off-duty. The results of this question are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3

Off-duty, Non-emergency Communications Methods

| Method | Survey Response | |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------|
| | Responses | Percent |
| E-mail | 75 | 81.5 |
| Telephone calls | 57 | 62 |
| Pagers | 33 | 35.9 |
| Face to face | 13 | 14.1 |
| Memo board | 13 | 14.1 |
| Newsletter | 13 | 14.1 |
| Call back/Meetings | 8 | 8.7 |
| Not applicable | 4 | 4.3 |
| Other | 13 | - |

Other methods listed in response to question 8 included: Text messages (n = 5), written memo, blog and web page (n = 2), firefighter response system, Blackberry, pagers for chief officers, method varies based on the information to be shared, and constant info-sharing.

Specific answers to research question 3, what responsibilities do employees of organizations have in communications efforts are as follows: Members of organizations are responsible to seek out information. However, the organization must provide the information. All members are responsible to participate in a feedback loop, providing information to individuals across the organization, usually following the chain of command. Managers are responsible to represent their subordinates and also to support communication efforts. The organization is

responsible to provide information and all members are responsible to use established methods to stay informed.

Survey question 9 was developed to help answer research question #3. Respondents were asked the following statements, which co-relate to Table 4:

- Statement 1: Members are responsible to seek out information on current events, policies, and guidelines
- Statement 2: The department is solely responsible for communication efforts
- Statement 3: Effective communications are important to maintain or improve morale
- Statement 4: Effective communications are just a small part of department morale
- Statement 5: Communications improvements in my department have improved morale

Table 4

Employee Responsibility for Communication Efforts

| Statement | Completely agree | Mostly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Completely disagree | Total |
|-----------|------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------|
| 1 | 29.3% | 35.9% | 29.3% | 5.4% | - | 92 |
| 2 | 3.3% | 25% | 28.3% | 22.8% | 20.7% | 92 |
| 3 | 88% | 12% | - | - | - | 92 |
| 4 | 8.8% | 8.8% | 22% | 35.2% | 25.3% | 91 |
| 5 | 33.7% | 44.6% | 18.5% | 3.3% | - | 92 |

One survey respondent indicated that employees are responsible to seek out information as far as the established methods put in place by the department but they are not responsible for seeking out information the department has failed to communicate. Eblin (2006) mentions speaking for the work, which also applied to research question 2. But this also applies to question

3 in terms of employee responsibility. Most respondents agreed that effective communications are important to maintain or improve morale and most also agreed that communication improvement in their organizations had improved morale.

HFA (2009) listed several responsibilities that all levels of their employees have with regard to communications efforts. Additionally they will develop a communications team to handle communications issues. Their senior managers are responsible to: endorse, promote, and support communications activity at the highest level, agree on key messages, represent the service at external partnership and regulatory bodies, promote the successes and good practices of the organization, lead the service with clear, consistent, and accessible communication

All managers have a responsibility to: make sure that all staff receive internal communications to support the performance of the organization, encourage staff to participate in consultations and provide feedback, uphold and share the vision and priorities of the Service, prioritize communications to staff, particularly during any time of change, monitor the use of internal communication methods within their area of responsibility. And all staff members have a responsibility to access appropriate information and seek clarification if they do not understand any communication.

Dr. Shelley Redinger (personal communication, February 22, 2010), superintendant of the Oregon Trail School District in Sandy, OR, stated that she uses a feedback loop for internal communications within her organization. This involves open communication between all members to provide information to others before they might need it. Any staff member needs to keep other informed. "If I know about something ahead of time, I can be prepared to answer questions later." She also mentioned the importance of follow-up communications. Often times she will deal with an issue presented to her from a subordinate. If she doesn't communicate the

results back to the person who reported it, they may assume she did nothing with the information causing the perception of inaction.

Dr. Scott Lazenby (personal communication, February 22, 2010), city manager for the City of Sandy, OR, believes that communication is a two-way street. Communication methods and information must be provided by the administration but “the individual is the only one who controls their psychological outlook to communicate.” The school district and the city include monthly newsletters as a method of communication with their employees.

The specific answers to research question 4, how improvements in communications can be measured, are as follows: snap polls of your personnel, listen to what people say during meetings and follow-up opportunities, attend meetings and make yourself available in informal settings, choose goals and outcomes. Write communication improvements into strategic plans, and consider conducting a strategic communications audit. When considering how to improve morale issues in the organization, review communication efforts and techniques for clues.

The Oregon Trail School District uses snap polls, focus groups and audits to determine the effectiveness of communications. The City of Sandy does not, however they take an atypical approach to the employee evaluation process that results in a greater amount of face to face communications. They have replaced their annual performance evaluations with employee goal-setting and they provide immediate and frequent feedback whenever necessary. They also have internal committees that communicate often and are made up of members at all ranks. These include their safety committee and the green team, which reviews efficiency methods and other ways to reduce the use of supplies and save money.

For the fire service response, survey question ten asked if any agencies used a method or tool to measure the effectiveness of internal communications. Only 10.9% ($n = 10$) answered yes

and 89.1% (n = 82) answered no. An open comments portion of the question allowed for individual answers with “yes” responses to expand the detail, which received 19 responses with several suggestions, including: strategic plan, survey (n = 5), the chief or leaders being present at meetings, hits on blog/web/Twitter sites (n = 2), general feedback, inclusion groups – representatives from ranks, response to requests for help or participation (n = 2), paying attention to rumors, and a shift meeting with the battalion chief. One response indicated the department was developing a plan for monitoring effectiveness and another replied that their department members hear what they want to hear.

Coffman (2004) addressed conducting an audit to make an assessment of the organization’s performance of communications practices. This can be conducted internally or with the help of a consultant. Coffman also discussed 16 essential strategic communications practices. One of the practices is to choose communication goals and outcomes. Another is to add a measurement step to monitor and evaluate communications.

The 11th and final optional survey question provided the opportunity for survey respondents to offer miscellaneous open comments, which are listed here:

- Employees respond to variety of communication methods based on many factors, such as age. The key to effective communications is to utilize a wide variety of communications mediums to try to reach the various cultures and generations within our workforce.
- A recent survey of city employees showed more than half of fire employees felt communications is still a huge issue, including lowering morale.
- When a fire department is made up of many kinds of services provided by many kinds of folks, successful communication is a must.

- As chief, I have established internal communications as my top priority, based on feedback received from members. They want clear, unambiguous, un-garbled communication.
- I think that communications is one of the biggest things out there in any line of work. Yet in most cases it is one of the least acted upon. People just do not want to take the time to do it or they want someone else to take care of it, with no follow-through. To me this is as big as safety topics.
- Any means of verifying a communication was sent is helpful. People seem to become more responsible for information if you take away the “I was never told that” response from them. E-mails are time stamped when sent and can be confirmed if and when opened. A newsletter place in an employee mailbox puts the responsibility on the recipient. Blasting information in several different mediums gives ample opportunity for the information to be received.
- We have become a communication-redundant department due to e-mails. Information is e-mailed, then faxed, and then sent through internal mail. A lot of time is wasted with redundancy. The e-mails sent from HQ are then re-sent by the Divisions and the Battalions.
- My department uses mostly e-mail for communications. Posted memo's and paper printed guides become outdated and non-maintained to the point no one uses them. Electronic guides can be maintained much better. E-mail communications have dual responsibility. As much as the sender has to send relevant clear messages, the receiver has to take time to read and act accordingly.

- Personnel are responsible to seek out information as far as the established methods that have been put in place by the department. They are not responsible for seeking out information that the department has failed to communicate. It is a key responsibility of the department to assure that they are diligent in communicating everything. Communication is a fine balancing act. If you don't communicate enough then the department becomes ineffective and morale suffers. If you communicate too much it also becomes ineffective because people begin to ignore the overload of information, which is potentially more damaging.
- The big c communication is face to face talking to people in all forums. The small c communication is written web etc. but is still valuable to put forward.
- Instead of typing memos with four or five sheets of carbon paper I now send out e-mails and I have "address groups" for all officers, house captains, drivers, staff etc. I am a firm believer that the more information everyone has, the smoother the department runs.
- Communications have improved in my department simply because I value communication. I have found that for general issues, e-mail works well. However you have to ask the individuals what e-mail they check; it's not always the department assigned address. Important issues that MUST be communicated are better done face-to-face and/or with written memos or letters that are passed directly to each individual.
- Text and voice messaging to cell phones via Firefighter Response System "enotify" (sic) module has been very effective and economical for urgent and non-emergency messages and updates. Also functions as a back-up to the tone/voice paging system.

Discussion

Research of literature, in conjunction with survey results from other fire service officials, supports the theory that communication is a key component to maintaining positive morale in the department. Seemingly simple communication methods can be used and/or developed using models and practices from private industry, consultants, and other fire service agencies.

With regard to types of effective communications, most sources agreed that face to face communication is something that is important, if not critical to effective communications. Kumuyi (2010) wrote that better persuasion and communication of the vision of an organization results from face to face communication. Cochran (2006) discussed the advantage of meetings to communicate information. He discussed “the irreplaceable value of oral communications with key fire department and fire service leaders.” (p. 23) He also mentioned about learning by walking around. When the chief or other executive officer actually visits other worksites, stations, etc. he or she can learn a lot about what is actually going on. It also provides an opportunity for face to face discussions with all ranks.

It was interesting to note that the study by O’Neil (2008), which was conducted in a large company with about 100,000 employees world-wide, concluded that timely, complete, accurate face to face communication is more effective in communicating organizational goals and strategies. In spite of the size of the study organization, there are some parallels that the fire service should consider. Basically, this company sought to make sure the employees learned about and embraced a specific body of knowledge that the organization deemed important, communicated it using their intra-net, and then measured the outcomes of the improved communications. The company cited used an employee survey, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews to determine if the body of knowledge was learned and retained. If an international

corporation confirms that face to face communication works best, what does that say for a fire agency that covers only a matter of square miles?

A small organization may not be capable of an extensive intra-net, but that could be an effective form of communication with members who are not always at the headquarters of an organization. Some agencies have a “members only” section of their website that is used for posting information. Many fire departments are beginning to host Facebook and Twitter pages for members and citizens to “follow” them or become a “fan” of them. It is common for EFO classes to make up e-mail groups to keep in touch using e-mail services such as Yahoo. Some survey respondents mentioned the use of an intra-net and website updates as a communications vehicle in their organizations. These methods seem like they could be a valuable tool for enhancing internal communications.

Organizations may also want to consider the use of a CMS and or LMS. Similar to the way an on-line, or hybrid college course operates using an on-line blackboard; a LMS is used to place students in contact with each other and the instructor. Dialogue occurs between individuals and the group via the on-line system. Information can be place on the LMS and individuals access it to either learn the material, respond, or both. Class assignments are placed on the LMS and students respond to it. The CMS manages content. Material and information from multiple sources can be place on a CMS for others to access. This could provide a valuable method for communication that fire service members could access anywhere they have internet access. elearningpost (sic) (2010) describes the use of these systems. In nearly any size organization, perhaps the use of a LMS would be an effective method to provide some information to members. The cost and logistical requirements of such a system were not researched as a part of this ARP.

The survey results showed that nearly 49% of responses indicated that they mostly agreed that face to face communication methods were most relied upon in their organization. 52.2% stated that they mostly agreed that staff meetings were most relied upon, which is another form of face to face communication. Interestingly, 50% of respondents mostly agreed that internal memos were mostly relied upon. These results imply that these three choices are nearly equal and indicate their importance. A department developing a plan for improving communications could choose either or all as a first choice based on their particular situation or needs. Word of mouth, the rumor mill and duty chief rounds all received marks indicating agreement that these are also relied upon to some degree by survey respondents. Most respondents indicated that they completely disagreed that the local newspaper was relied upon.

In a related question asking for open responses, 76% indicated that they believed face to face would be the most effective means of communicating with the intended audience in their department. This could mean that even though there seems to be a high level of reliance on electronic forms of communication, even our peers agree that face to face would be a better way to deliver the message.

So why don't we do more of that? One explanation is that in this day of convenience and electronics, maybe it's just easier not to. With time constraints and an expectation to keep elected officials or city management informed, and work with them, the available time for the chief to communicate with his department can suffer. In this case, electronic forms of communication could be perceived to have replaced face to face communication and it can be easily misunderstood. The chief could work with the department's executive staff to develop solutions to help lessen the impact of these occurrences.

Eblin (2006) stated that because of the increase in demand to communicate with a greater number of people, the amount of data that senior executives receive is very high and can cause difficulty for the executive sorting through it. It's been the experience of this researcher that the more communications received, the more pressure there is to respond quickly. So, it seems much more convenient to type up a quick e-mail or a memo, and send it electronically, or if overwhelmed even put it off. Could it be just a perception that executive officers don't make enough attempts to meet face to face? Maybe not, but Eblin's research also indicates one reason that there could be the perception of it.

While e-mail may be a great way to get a message out fast, it may not always be the best way to deliver all messages. SCM (2009) also learned from Coca-Cola that "face to face is still hard to beat." A good conference or event is a vital operation channel for their employees who are not on-line regularly. The researcher believes that with face to face communications the content and context of the message can be conveyed more accurately than in e-mail messages. Depending on the writing skills of the person sending the message, a written message can't always do that.

Regardless of the size of a department, face to face communication is possible at every level. In larger departments, the chief officers may have to use some creativity to accomplish this throughout the organization, but larger organizations may have more options to accomplish this, including methods such as video conferencing or closed circuit television. The survey results showed only a few comments about chiefs needing to attend more face to face meetings. This could be because most of the respondents (n = 81 out of 92) were chief officers who already attend many meetings and might believe that they don't have an issue.

Email is fast and efficient but one response from the survey indicated that their department has become communication-redundant because of e-mails. Information is e-mailed, faxed, and sent through internal mail creating redundancy and wasted time. This also speaks to research question 2 which asks what types of communications would improve the situation.

Eblin (2006) presents an interesting communications framework that can be used in nearly any organization. Based on three open-ended questions, this method can lead to better clarity and understanding and also aid the executive who must sort through a lot of data.

1. What? What issue needs to be addressed
2. So what? What makes this worthy of consideration
3. Now what? What needs to be done? What action or support do you need? What are the benchmarks?

This framework appears to be very simple to use and it can be implemented with the expectation that people who bring issues to their supervisors can or should answer the questions prior to bringing it to their supervisor. This can also be used to communicate down the chain of command because having these questions answered prior to delivering a message can improve communications. And, if the process of answering the questions can involve other stakeholders, this can lead to improved communications and buy-in.

Eblin (2006) believes that effective communication is both strategic and intentional. When we communicate, we should consider the key idea that we want others to receive, how we want the audience to feel as a result of the communication and what action do we want the audience to take. And some comments made by an executive in an organization may be taken out of context because people can sometimes take comments too literally. As executives we need to

be careful what they say because it can and will be quoted and used actively. Sometimes it can be easier to communicate when things are less formal and better dialogue can occur.

Garcia (2009) discussed the impact of how decisions are communicated to the organization. He describes three types of decisions, which if not communicated effectively, can lead to de-motivation of employees:

- Administrative decisions, which are made solely by administration
- Participative decisions made by administration after asking for input
- Committee-based decisions which are completely turned over to a committee

When making administrative or participative decisions, it should be made clear when the time for input is over. Sometimes these decisions deal with delicate matters and the reasoning needs to remain confidential. But if it's not, sharing and justifying the reasons for the decision can help the organization understand that their input was valued. Many organizational decisions can be made in a participative manner as long as it is clear what the rules are. If the decision will be made by the leader after receiving input from others, he or she should declare that at the beginning of the process.

Committee decisions should be left as committee decisions unless there is a valid and justifiable reason to stray from it. This should be approached with caution. The researcher has seen committee decision processes that were started as a collaborative effort change into administrative decision processes with inadequate reasoning given for it. This may leave a stinging sensation, cause hard feelings, and a loss of trust that can hamper future decision processes where the leader really needs the help of others. When there is a violation of trust, it can be hard to gain it back.

Among common values usually stated by fire departments, Gerling (2009) suggests that respect, trust, and open honest communications are among the most common. He also states that these values are part of an effort to achieve higher morale and a happier culture. If there is a fear to communicate openly, it may be helpful to conduct a survey or other specialized process that can allow members to express concerns without fear. Regular and structured meetings can also help diagnose or solve problems in an organization.

Eblin (2006) discussed how audiences process spoken information and the corresponding impact of the presentation the audience: the content of the presentation – 55% of the impact, the speaker's body language – 33% of the impact, the speaker's tone of voice – 7% of the impact. This information implies that if a leader wants to communicate effectively, they must manage their presence as well as the content of their message. This strongly affects how the audience will remember the information and perhaps how they choose to use it. The way a speaker presents themselves to others should help persuade the audience toward the desired end result.

Leaders should practice positive communications. Members of the organization will look toward a leader who is enthusiastic and optimistic about the future. Kouzes & Pozner (2010) also recommend addressing the organization with an image of the future for the leader and the organization. This type of communication could help reduce fear and speculation of the future vision of the department.

Not everyone possesses the ability to be a dynamic and charismatic speaker and audiences can sense if the message isn't genuine. NFA (2005) provide suggestions with regard to use of power that can help. If the presenter is simply honest and does their best to pay attention to what others are saying, attempts to communicate clear priorities, gets people's attention, focuses on important issue in a discussion, listening for feelings and ideas, and has the ability to

get complicated ideas across clearly, they can be effective. For some people this comes naturally but for others it requires a bit of practice. This use of power can help align people by creating a connection with goals and values of others.

Data from HFA (2009) identified specific areas of responsibility for staff members. Of interest is the section that identifies who is responsible for what, in terms of internal communications.

Senior managers are responsible to:

- Endorse, promote, and support communications activity at the highest level
- Agree on key messages
- Represent the service at external partnership and regulatory bodies
- Promote the successes and good practices of the organization
- Lead the service with clear, consistent, and accessible communication

All managers have a responsibility to:

- Make sure that all staff receive internal communications to support the performance of the organization
- Encourage staff to participate in consultations and provide feedback
- Uphold and share the vision and priorities of the Service
- Prioritize communications to staff, particularly during any time of change
- Monitor the use of internal communication methods within their area of responsibility

All staff members have a responsibility to:

- Access appropriate information and seek clarification if they do not understand any communication.

HFA (2009) also recommended establishing a communications team to handle communications and marketing, establish corporate identity, and establish guidelines on how to use their service brand or logo among several other responsibilities. This data indicates that all members of an organization have some responsibility to communicate within the organization. One survey respondent offered a valuable reply with regard to this topic: personnel are responsible to seek out information to the extent the information is provided by the department. However, they are not responsible to seek out information the department failed to communicate. The department has a key responsibility to be diligent in communicating effectively.

Eblin (2006) mentioned the topic of speaking for the work. As a manager or a leader, it is your responsibility to point out the successes of your team members because sometimes senior executives may be too busy to always notice successes unless they are pointed out. Most team leaders guide projects and use the collective talent of the group to accomplish goals. Credibility can be gained by making sure that, as a leader, you don't allow the work to speak for itself, you speak for the work and make sure your subordinates get credit for the work they've done. Your personal work will then speak for itself. If your team is successful, the work your team did will reflect on you.

Dr. Shelley Redinger (personal communication, February 22, 2010) emphasized the importance of follow-up and a feedback loop. This practice can help make sure that messages were received and that the content of the message was understood or dealt with. In an agency with perceived or actual communications issues, the problem very well could be the effectiveness of it. The agency could choose to examine all of their communications practices, conduct research on how to make improvements with communications, and establish a method to measure those improvements.

Coffman (2004) addressed the process of conducting a SCA to make a systematic assessment of the organization's performance of communications practices. This can be conducted internally, which could have the advantage of cost savings, and provide for effective communication within an organization simply as a result of performing the audit. The use of an outside consultant can be an advantage because of possible saving time without losing focus and advancement toward department goals and objectives. Smaller agencies with fewer resources may find this to be the case unless the cost savings outweigh this option. A consultant may also be able to bring more ideas and experience to the table that the organization may be able to take advantage of.

Coffman also discussed 16 essential strategic communications practices. These are divided into three categories: strategy, implementation, and support and alignment. There is a relationship to measuring communication improvements in the category of strategy, where it was recommended to choose goals and outcomes. In the implementation category it is recommended to add a measurement step to monitor and evaluate communications. These steps will aid in measurement of the communication effort.

These 16 recommended practices indicate that effective communication needs to be planned out carefully and thoughtfully. Many fire agencies do not have the luxury of having a division or even one person who can focus on communications techniques and improvements. O'Neil (2008) discussed the use of focus groups to develop and review communications. Measurement steps can be set up by these groups to monitor effectiveness.

Survey question 10 asked if any agencies use any type of method or tool to measure the effectiveness of internal communications. Out of 92 responses, only ten people indicated that their departments have attempted this and 19 methods were mentioned. These included: strategic

plan, surveys, suggesting that the chief or leaders being present at meetings, measuring hits on blog/web/Twitter sites, asking for general feedback, inclusion groups – representatives from ranks, measuring responses to requests for help or participation, suggestions to pay attention to rumors, and shift meetings with the battalion/duty chief. One response indicated the department was developing a plan for monitoring effectiveness and another opined that their department members hear only what they want to hear.

The strategic plan suggestion was also mentioned in the literature review. These plans can list communication as an improvement goal with development of objectives to improve it. The strategic plan from MLFD (2009) mentions exploring, evaluating and implementing communication tools, and HFA (2009) mentions that managers have the responsibility to encourage staff to participate in consultations and provide feedback. In any strategic plan, improving or measuring communications effectiveness should be placed as a high priority.

With regard to incident command and scene management, how often during a post incident analysis is it enthusiastically agreed that the communications during the incident went perfectly? In cases where communications suffered, the researcher's department usually studied what went wrong and then trained on it, or addressed equipment issues to decrease or prevent the chance of a re-occurrence. Why shouldn't we also evaluate failures or deficiencies of normal day-to-day communications when they occur? This is also related to feedback and follow-up.

Other suggestions from the survey, which included ensuring attendance of the chief or high-ranking officers at appropriate meetings, asking for feedback, paying attention to rumors and shift meetings, all seem to be common sense practices. As hard as we might try, sometimes we can fall down on these simple methods. And even if we don't, we may still be perceived as not doing enough of these practices.

One survey response indicated that the effort to communicate can be a problem both ways; not enough communication or too much, which can be potentially more damaging because of the overload of information. Dr. Scott Lazenby (personal communication, February 22, 2010) commented that the employee is the only one responsible for their psychological outlook and how receptive they are to communicate.

In recent years, commercial social websites and communication mediums such as Facebook and Twitter have entered our world. Several departments surrounding the researcher's department, as well as departments of fellow EFO students, are beginning to use these mediums, and a few survey respondents mentioned this fact. These can be focused on a particular audience or left open to the public. The Twitter accounts of some agencies near SFD are being followed by the press, providing a very fast and effective method for the public information officer to pass information on, especially during an emergency. An agency should use caution when developing a site for members of their department to receive communications so that sensitive or confidential information can be protected to the extent possible. Since these mediums are usually not protected, and most information coming from or developed by a public agency is usually considered "public", caution should be exercised when considering what kind of information to make available using these mediums.

The use of surveys was also mentioned in general survey comments as well as the literature. Gerling (2009) stated that open and honest communications are common values stated by fire departments. Fearless and open communication is needed, sometimes in the form of surveys. A survey can be a great tool to learn things about the organization that are not always apparent to the leadership, or even the membership. However there are some cautions that should be considered. While not the focus of this ARP, the researcher's department recently conducted

an anonymous survey of department members in order to discover what issues were of concern. The topic of internal communications was raised, leading to the development of this research project.

SFD members were asked to complete an electronic survey consisting of forced-choice and open-ended questions allowing them to write some responses. In a survey such as this, any leader needs to be prepared for what they will read. Given anonymity, otherwise quiet and seemingly respectful individuals may choose to make the most of their opportunity to show great disrespect and write very painful comments. It's been the experience of this researcher that only a small percentage of the membership will do this while most of the members will provide helpful and constructive feedback and criticism. People will write their perceptions of things, which may not always be reality, but to them it's how they see it.

Leaders who choose to conduct surveys should take care when developing the survey questions. The questions should be written to elicit constructive answers to the problems, so if you don't want to hear it, don't ask. Better yet, be careful how you ask. If open-ended questions are allowed, consider the space that each respondent will be allowed to fill. If no limits are given, an individual can write at length, which can cause difficulty when analyzing data. Agencies should also consider the use of an outside agency or consultant to assist them if they believe it will add credibility to the survey.

The implications of this research are clear for SFD. Simple but diligent improvements will improve communications and could contribute to improvements in morale and relationships between members.

Several ideas for communications improvements were researched and many more were provided as suggestions from the survey. MPFD (2008), Spokane Fire Department (2007), and

MLFD (2009) developed several objectives in their strategic plans that appear to be very simple to implement and monitor. However, in a small combination fire department some ideas, while solid and positive, may not be as feasible.

In the researcher's department these mediums or methods are feasible: honor the chain of command, face to face, continue to post memos and training announcements, continue the monthly internal newsletter with the training and event calendar, enhance the SFD website to improve internal information sharing, e-mail, Twitter, Facebook, the process of developing and writing operating guides and policies, increase one-one-one contact with the chief, group text messaging, paging, daily, weekly or monthly staff meetings, continue weekly drill announcements, and development of a communications focus group to explore, evaluate, and implement a variety of communications tools.

The only ideas that may not be feasible either due to financial resources and/or current limitations in technology are development of intra-net, LMS/CMS systems, and the use of closed circuit television. However, knowledge of these methods will allow SFD and other like-sized agencies to develop plans for the future. This justifies the reason for including a very broad section of fire service officials, from different sized organizations, in the survey.

Recommendations

Based on the research or literature and the analysis of the survey, the results of this research could improve communications within SFD and could lead to more positive morale.

This research led to the following recommendations:

- Improve the frequency of staff meetings. Do not underestimate the effectiveness of this method. Rumors can be stopped dead in their tracks and the source of rumors can be brought to light. Communications can take place freely in this forum.

- Take advantage of face to face communications whenever practical, even informal meetings or events. These methods can provide better communication and feedback. The intent of a statement can be more apparent in person and the other person(s) can ask questions about it easier.
- Develop procedures for producing, distributing and posting department memorandums. Leave little opportunity for members to claim that they were not given information or that they “didn’t get that memo.”
- Make sure the department’s mission, vision and values are developed using the skill and input of the organization. Post these openly so that people can see and remember them. Work these into the organizational culture.
- Do not substitute what should be face-to-face communications with strictly electronic or written methods. This research effort has proven that direct communication, with a well thought-out message and effective delivery, is simply the best way to make sure a message is communicated in the context that is intended.
- Provide several ways for members to access and/or find the information you want them to receive. While the members of an organization have some responsibility to seek out information, the organization must provide it, and in a variety of ways that meet the needs of the organization. Perhaps forms of an intra-net or commercially hosted web/social sites, or CMS/LMS system could be considered as options.
- Establish a practice of evaluating communication failures in order to determine the root cause(s). Similar to a post-incident analysis, this could reduce future occurrences and show the organization that administration cares about maintaining an open and vibrant communications process.

- Form a committee, focus group, or inclusion group as part of the department's leadership group, labor/management and volunteer personnel in order to review organizational communications. Review the sixteen essential strategic communications practices from SCA to help develop goals and objectives for this group.
- Ensure that there is follow-up with communications and ideas. Allow for a feedback loop for information to flow.
- Enhance the SFD website by adding direct contact capability to key fire department staff and enhance the fire department portal to include a method for employees to share ideas. Consider what types of information should be limited or restricted from the website. Consider use of CMS and LMS systems.
- Develop guidelines to establish Facebook and Twitter pages.
- Ensure that internal groups, such as safety committees, are made up from a cross-section of the membership and that they are discussing timely and appropriate topics. These groups can help communications by simply opening topics for discussion.

Reference List

- Cochran, K. J. (2006). Management and leadership. In Buckman, J.M. III. (Ed.), *Chief Fire Officer's Desk Reference* (p.23). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.
- Coffman, J. (2004). *Strategic Communications Audits*. Retrieved February 11, 2010, from <http://www.mediaevaluationproject.org/WorkingPaper1.pdf>
- Eblin, S. (2006). Pick up custom-fit communications. *The Next Level* (pp. 62-65). Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black Publishing.
- Elearningpost. (2010). *LCMS = LMS + CMS [RLOs]*. Retrieved February 20, 2010, from http://www.elearningpost.com/articles/archives/lcms_lms_cms_rlos/
- Garcia, K. (2009). Mind made up? *Fire Rescue*, 27 (5), 58-60.
- Gerling, K. (2009). Values fulfilled. *Fire Chief*, 53 (1), 50-55.
- Humberside Fire Authority [HFA]. (2009). *Draft Corporate Communications Strategy*. Retrieved January 29, 2010, from http://www.humbersidefire.gov.uk/documents/Quality/Corporate_Communications_Strategy.pdf
- Kouzes, J. and Pozner, B. (2010). Enlist Others: attracting people to common purposes. In J. L. Perry (Ed.), *The jossey-bass reader on non profit and public leadership* (pp. 360-370). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kumuyi, W. (2010). Seven communication tips an effective leader must have. In J. L. Perry (Ed.), *The jossey-bass reader on non profit and public leadership* (pp. 409-417). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam-Webster. (2009). Retrieved January 21, 2010, from <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/communication>

Monterey Park Fire Department [MPFD]. (2008). *Strategic Plan*. Retrieved July 1, 2009, from <http://www.ci.monterey-park.ca.us/Index.aspx?page=26>

Mt. Lebanon Fire Department [MLFD]. (2009). *Strategic Plan*. Retrieved January 29, 2010, from http://www.mtlfd.org/uploads/mtlfd_strategicplan_2009.pdf

National Fire Academy [NFA]. (2005). *Executive leadership student manual*. Emmitsburg, MD: Author

National Fire Academy [NFA]. (2009). *Executive Fire Officer Program Operational Policies and Procedures*. (p.II-2) Retrieved February 22, 2010, from http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/efop_guidelines.pdf

O'Neil, J. (2008). *Measuring the Impact of Employee Communication on Employee Comprehension and Action: A Case Study of a Major International Firm*. Retrieved November 30, 2009, from <http://auth.iweb.prsa.org/xmembernet/main/pdfpull.cfm?prcfile=6D-020201.pdf>

Spokane Fire Department. (2007). *Strategic Plan*. Retrieved July 1, 2009, from http://www.spokanefire.org/documents/FD_Strategic_Plan_2007.pdf





Strategic Communications Management [SCM]. (2009). Coca-Cola Enterprises' Vision for Engagement. Retrieved February 1, 2010, from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb5797/





United States Fire Administration [USFA]. (2009). *Strategic Plan*. (p. 10) Retrieved February 22, 2010, from http://www.usfa.dhs.gov/downloads/pdf/strategic_plan.pdf

Appendix A

Survey Instrument and Responses

Internal Communications

| 1. Your department/organization is : | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------------|----------------|
| | | Response Percent | Response Count |
| All Volunteer |  | 2.2% | 2 |
| Fully Career |  | 48.9% | 45 |
| Combination |  | 47.8% | 44 |
| Other |  | 1.1% | 1 |
| <i>answered question</i> | | | 92 |
| <i>skipped question</i> | | | 0 |

| 2. Your rank is the equivalent of: | | | |
|---|---|------------------|----------------|
| | | Response Percent | Response Count |
| Firefighter or administrative employee |  | 1.1% | 1 |
| Company officer or front line supervisor |  | 10.9% | 10 |
| Battalion Chief, Division Chief, Mid-Level Management |  | 19.6% | 18 |
| Chief, Assistant Chief, Executive level officer |  | 68.5% | 63 |
| Elected official, Board, Commission or Council member | | 0.0% | 0 |
| Other (please specify) | | | 2 |
| <i>answered question</i> | | | 92 |
| <i>skipped question</i> | | | 0 |

Other ranks (n = 2) were listed as executive support staff and the other was an erroneous entry.



| 3. Which types of organizational communications do you believe are currently MOST RELIED UPON in your department? | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| | Completely agree | Mostly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Completely disagree | Response Count |
| Word of mouth | 17.0% (15) | 38.6% (34) | 29.5% (26) | 13.6% (12) | 1.1% (1) | 88 |
| Rumor mill | 9.2% (8) | 25.3% (22) | 34.5% (30) | 19.5% (17) | 11.5% (10) | 87 |
| Staff meetings | 28.9% (26) | 52.2% (47) | 15.6% (14) | 3.3% (3) | 0.0% (0) | 90 |
| Internal newsletter | 13.2% (10) | 18.4% (14) | 26.3% (20) | 10.5% (8) | 31.6% (24) | 76 |
| Duty chief/station rounds | 18.1% (15) | 42.2% (35) | 21.7% (18) | 13.3% (11) | 4.8% (4) | 83 |
| Internal memos | 25.6% (23) | 50.0% (45) | 18.9% (17) | 4.4% (4) | 1.1% (1) | 90 |
| Face to face | 36.7% (33) | 48.9% (44) | 14.4% (13) | 0.0% (0) | 0.0% (0) | 90 |
| Local newspaper | 0.0% (0) | 1.2% (1) | 30.1% (25) | 27.7% (23) | 41.0% (34) | 83 |
| Other (please specify) | | | | | | 19 |
| <i>answered question</i> | | | | | | 92 |
| <i>skipped question</i> | | | | | | 0 |





| 4. Please list up to four internal communication methods that you believe are, or would be, the MOST EFFECTIVE in terms of reaching the intended audience in your department. | | | | |
|---|-------------|--|-------------------|----------------|
| | | | Response Percent | Response Count |
| 1. | <div></div> | | 100.0% | 92 |
| 2. | <div></div> | | 93.5% | 86 |
| 3. | <div></div> | | 88.0% | 81 |
| 4. | <div></div> | | 73.9% | 68 |
| | | | answered question | 92 |
| | | | skipped question | 0 |

Question 3, other open-ended responses included the following: E-mail (n = 14), Website (n = 2). Daily log, paging, intranet, TV and direct mail received one vote each.

Question 4, open-ended responses

| Method | Choice 1 | Choice 2 | Choice 3 | Choice 4 | Total |
|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Face to face | 30 | 15 | 13 | 12 | 70 |
| Staff meeting | 14 | 21 | 18 | 17 | 70 |
| Email | 29 | 12 | 11 | 6 | 58 |
| Memo | 11 | 19 | 18 | 7 | 55 |
| Newsletter | 10 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 30 |
| Video, CCTV | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 8 |
| Pager | 2 | 3 | 0 | 2 | 7 |
| Website | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 7 |
| Phone | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Text message | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Direct mail | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Conference Call | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Town Meeting | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | | | | | |



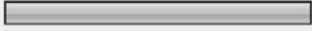

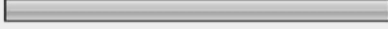





| 5. Have you observed improvements in communications following the addition of any specific communication methods? | | |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| | | Response Percent Response Count |
| Yes |  | 58.7% 54 |
| No |  | 41.3% 38 |
| answered question | | 92 |
| skipped question | | 0 |

| 6. If you answered Yes to the previous question, please list up to four communication methods used. | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| | | Response Percent Response Count |
| 1. |  | 100.0% 53 |
| 2. |  | 67.9% 36 |
| 3. |  | 34.0% 18 |
| 4. |  | 15.1% 8 |
| answered question | | 53 |
| skipped question | | 39 |









Question 6, Open-ended responses

| Method | Choice 1 | Choice 2 | Choice 3 | Choice 4 | Total |
|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| E-mail | 9 | 11 | 7 | 3 | 30 |
| Staff meeting | 16 | 10 | 3 | 1 | 30 |
| Face to face | 6 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 9 |
| Newsletter | 4 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 9 |
| Memo | 2 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 8 |
| Station visits | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 5 |
| Website posting | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Conference call | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

| Method | Choice 1 | Choice 2 | Choice 3 | Choice 4 | Total |
|--------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Bulletin – wall posting | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Intranet | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Survey | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Paging | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Operating policies or guidelines | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Mail | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Text messaging – individual or group | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

| 7. What methods of communication does your department use to communicate with out-stations, staffed or un-staffed? | | | |
|--|---|------------------|----------------|
| | | Response Percent | Response Count |
| Personal visits |  | 67.4% | 62 |
| Faxes |  | 12.0% | 11 |
| Phone calls |  | 58.7% | 54 |
| Conference calls |  | 14.1% | 13 |
| Electronic mail |  | 73.9% | 68 |
| Electronic Bulletin Board |  | 8.7% | 8 |
| Posted memo's |  | 47.8% | 44 |
| Closed circuit, satellite, or cable TV |  | 7.6% | 7 |
| Web sources such as Skype or equivalent |  | 1.1% | 1 |
| Not Applicable |  | 16.3% | 15 |
| Other (please specify) | | | 14 |
| <i>answered question</i> | | | 92 |
| <i>skipped question</i> | | | 0 |

Question 7 other responses were: video conference (n = 2), staff meetings (n = 2), intranet, paging (n = 2), CMS/LMS program, and miscellaneous comments.

| 8. For non-emergency communications, what methods does your department use to get information to members who are not on-duty or readily available? | | | |
|--|---|------------------|----------------|
| | | Response Percent | Response Count |
| Pagers |  | 35.9% | 33 |
| Telephone calls |  | 62.0% | 57 |
| Face to face |  | 14.1% | 13 |
| Call-back for meetings |  | 8.7% | 8 |
| Memo board |  | 14.1% | 13 |
| Newsletter |  | 14.1% | 13 |
| E-mails |  | 81.5% | 75 |
| N/A |  | 4.3% | 4 |
| Other (please specify) | | | 13 |
| answered question | | | 92 |
| skipped question | | | 0 |

Other methods listed in response to question 8 included: Text messages (n = 5), written memo, blog and web page (n = 2), firefighter response system, Blackberry, pagers for chief officers, method varies based on the information to be shared, and constant info-sharing.

| 9. Please answer the following statements by indicating to what level you agree or disagree with each statement. | | | | | | |
|---|------------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| | Completely Agree | Mostly agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Completely disagree | Response Count |
| Members of an organization are personally responsible to seek out information on current events, department policies / guidelines | 29.3% (27) | 35.9% (33) | 29.3% (27) | 5.4% (5) | 0.0% (0) | 92 |
| The department is solely responsible for communication efforts | 3.3% (3) | 25.0% (23) | 28.3% (26) | 22.8% (21) | 20.7% (19) | 92 |
| Effective communications are important in order to maintain or improve department morale | 88.0% (81) | 12.0% (11) | 0.0% (0) | 0.0% (0) | 0.0% (0) | 92 |
| Effective communications are just a small part of department morale | 8.8% (8) | 8.8% (8) | 22.0% (20) | 35.2% (32) | 25.3% (23) | 91 |
| Improvements in communications in my department have improved morale, either currently or in the past | 33.7% (31) | 44.6% (41) | 18.5% (17) | 3.3% (3) | 0.0% (0) | 92 |
| answered question | | | | | | 92 |
| skipped question | | | | | | 0 |

| 10. Does your agency use any sort of method or tool to measure the effectiveness of internal communications? | | | | Response Percent | Response Count |
|--|------------------------|--|--|---------------------|-------------------|
| Yes | <div><div></div></div> | | | 10.9% | 10 |
| No | <div><div></div></div> | | | 89.1% | 82 |
| Comments | | | | | 19 |
| | answered question | | | | 92 |
| | skipped question | | | | 0 |

The open comments portion for question 10 allowed for individual answers with “yes” responses to expand the detail, which received 19 responses with several suggestions, including: strategic plan, survey (n = 5), the chief or leaders being present at meetings, hits on blog/web/Twitter sites (n = 2), general feedback, inclusion groups – representatives from ranks,

response to requests for help or participation ($n = 2$), paying attention to rumors, and a shift meeting with the battalion chief. One response indicated the department was developing a plan for monitoring effectiveness and another replied that their department members hear what they want to hear.

| 11. If you have any miscellaneous comments you may enter them here. | | |
|---|--------------------------|----------------|
| | | Response Count |
| | | 24 |
| | <i>answered question</i> | 24 |
| | <i>skipped question</i> | 68 |

| 12. Thank you for your time! If you would like a copy of the survey results, please leave your contact information. | | | |
|---|----------------------|------------------|----------------|
| | | Response Percent | Response Count |
| Name | <input type="text"/> | 100.0% | 48 |
| City, State | <input type="text"/> | 97.9% | 47 |
| E-Mail Address | <input type="text"/> | 97.9% | 47 |
| <i>answered question</i> | | | 48 |
| <i>skipped question</i> | | | 44 |

Question 11, Miscellaneous Comments:

- Employees respond to variety of communication methods based on many factors, such as age. The key to effective communications is to utilize a wide variety of communications mediums to try to reach the various cultures and generations within our workforce.
- A recent survey of city employees showed more than half of fire employees felt communications is still a huge issue, including lowering morale.

- When a fire department is made up of many kinds of services provided by many kinds of folks, successful communication is a must.
- As chief, I have established internal communications as my top priority, based on feedback received from members. They want clear, unambiguous, un-garbled communication.
- I think that communications is one of the biggest things out there in any line of work. Yet in most cases it is one of the least acted upon. People just do not want to take the time to do it or they want someone else to take care of it, with no follow-through. To me this is as big as safety topics.
- Any means of verifying a communication was sent is helpful. People seem to become more responsible for information if you take away the “I was never told that” response from them. E-mails are time stamped when sent and can be confirmed if and when opened. A newsletter place in an employee mailbox puts the responsibility on the recipient. Blasting information in several different mediums gives ample opportunity for the information to be received.
- We have become a communication-redundant department due to e-mails. Information is e-mailed, then faxed, and then sent through internal mail. A lot of time is wasted with redundancy. The e-mails sent from HQ are then re-sent by the Divisions and the Battalions.
- My department uses mostly e-mail for communications. Posted memo’s and paper printed guides become outdated and non-maintained to the point no one uses them. Electronic guides can be maintained much better. E-mail communications have dual

responsibility. As much as the sender has to send relevant clear messages, the receiver has to take time to read and act accordingly.

- Personnel are responsible to seek out information as far as the established methods that have been put in place by the department. They are not responsible for seeking out information that the department has failed to communicate. It is a key responsibility of the department to assure that they are diligent in communicating everything. Communication is a fine balancing act. If you don't communicate enough then the department becomes ineffective and morale suffers. If you communicate too much it also becomes ineffective because people begin to ignore the overload of information, which is potentially more damaging.
- The big c communication is face to face talking to people in all forums. The small c communication is written web etc. but is still valuable to put forward.
- Instead of typing memos with four or five sheets of carbon paper I now send out e-mails and I have "address groups" for all officers, house captains, drivers, staff etc. I am a firm believer that the more information everyone has, the smoother the department runs.
- Communications have improved in my department simply because I value communication. I have found that for general issues, e-mail works well. However you have to ask the individuals what e-mail they check; it's not always the department assigned address. Important issues that MUST be communicated are better done face-to-face and/or with written memos or letters that are passed directly to each individual.

- Text and voice messaging to cell phones via Firefighter Response System “enotify” (sic) module has been very effective and economical for urgent and non-emergency messages and updates. Also functions as a back-up to the tone/voice paging system.

Appendix B

Survey and Personal Communications Contacts

- Troy Negret, Oak Grove, MO
- Peggy Halley, Lake Oswego, OR
- Jerome Palmer, Johnson City, TN
- Tim Gilsrud, Coon Rapids, MN
- Mark Finucane, Johnson, City, TN
- Terry Ney, Sheridan, OR
- Michael Hansen, Roseburg, OR
- Dale Kamrath, Seaside, OR
- John Nohr, Portland, OR
- Patrick Hart, Hermiston, OR
- Rick Merryfield, Eau Claire, WI
- Pat Parker, Traverse City, MI
- Kevin Nord, Duxbury, MA
- Chuck Baird, Marietta, GA
- Russ Thompson, Springfield, VT
- Nathan School, Cumberland ME
- Phil Tiffany, Ft. Lupton, CO
- Greg Marlar, Roseburg, OR
- Frank Blackley, Wilmington, NC
- Alan Hull, Estacada, OR
- Pat Humphries, Virginia Beach, VA
- Paul Baxter, Eastern Region, New Zealand Fire Service
- Joe Houck, Summit NJ
- Ken Horst, Tuscaloosa, AL
- Wayne Johnson, Shaker Heights, OH
- Doug Branch, Boring, OR
- Ed Wilson, Lake Oswego, OR
- Tracey Mosley, Wilson, NC
- Brian McVicker, Lake Oswego, OR
- Bill Martineau, North Andover, MA
- Greg Jones, West Des Moines, Iowa
- David Morris, Lake Oswego, OR
- Michael Greisen, Scappoose, OR
- Jay Tappan, St. Helens, OR
- Michael Funk, Gladstone, OR
- Mic Eby, Welches, OR
- Scott Lewis, Gresham, OR
- Mark Stevens, Aloha OR
- Ed Kirchofer, Clackamas, OR
- Vince Stafford, Molalla, OR
- Ted Kunze, Canby, OR

- Bob Cozzie, Oregon City, OR
- Travis Vaughn, Lenexa, KS
- Ray Hansen, Pinellas Park, FL
- Lee Glover, Frisco, TX
- JJ Jones, Sherman, TX
- Pam Moore, Indianapolis, IN
- Phil Schneider, Sandy, OR

Survey requests were sent to individuals with the following fire agencies but their participation could not be confirmed:

- Chapel Hill, NC
- Odessa, TX
- Lincoln, NE
- Marysville, WA
- Chesterfield, VA
- Spotsylvania, VA
- Clyde, OH
- Monroe, NC
- Charlevoix, MI
- Hong Kong, China
- New York City
- East Hartford, CT
- Payson, AZ
- New Hanover F & R, NC
- Clark County FD #12, WA
- Poulsbo, WA
- Miami Twp. OH
- Casper, WY
- Keene, NH
- St. Petersburg, FL
- Laguna Beach, CA
- Wichita, KS
- Cleveland, OH
- Philadelphia, PA
- North Charleston, SC
- North Slope, AK
- Tulsa, OK
- Oakland Park FL
- Suffolk, VA
- Casper, WY
- Clark County 3, WA
- Middletown, CT
- Flower Mound, TX
- Pendleton, OR

- Eaton, OH
- Cranston, RI
- Fairfax County, VA
- Florence, KY
- Ft. Lauderdale, FL
- Dallas, TX
- Washington, DC
- Estero, FL
- Fort Worth, TX
- Frederick County, MD
- Winchester, KY
- Victoria, TX
- Village of Pinehurst, NC
- York Center Fire, IL
- Town of Cary, NC
- Town of Stratford, CT
- Mid-Columbia Fire, The Dalles, OR
- Aurora, OR
- Portland, OR
- Siuslaw FD, Florence, OR
- Goldsboro, NC
- Carpentersville, IL
- Watertown, NY
- Yuma, AZ
- Westerville, OH
- Whitman, MA
- Sugarland, TX
- Tucson, AZ
- Town of Delafield, WI
- Central Kitsap FD, WA

The following survey respondents were only identified by the internet provider location collected by SurveyMonkey:

76.27.240.65 , 69.59.221.27 , 67.182.133.88, 65.207.215.234, 74.62.96.236,
 216.67.131.97 , 173.11.7.50, 75.100.70.188, 65.43.68.203, 75.100.70.188, 65.43.68.203,
 76.7.147.222, 71.38.148.152, 165.83.132.249, 72.130.250.98, 206.72.10.2, 12.171.54.190 ,
 75.110.91.210, 74.11.32.250, 70.62.156.10, 76.231.244.19, 66.192.200.66, 206.222.59.142,
 207.190.255.189, 70.61.91.165, 71.252.64.50, 166.193.109.147, 68.174.198.107,
 198.252.245.194 , 216.105.209.46 , 68.225.53.107, 74.38.9.107, 72.165.188.2, 75.150.253.13,

208.46.237.130, 71.113.229.66, 24.241.105.138, 24.227.240.66, 24.188.119.253,
216.155.212.142, 74.93.185.73, 162.42.189.34, 216.155.209.92, 152.31.193.130, 174.44.63.49,
64.129.115.45

Personal Communications Contacts

- Dr. Scott Lazenby, City Manager City of Sandy, OR 503-668-5533
- Kelley Neumeier, GIS Specialist Clackamas County, OR 503-723-4815
- Dr. Shelley Redinger, Superintendent Oregon Trail School Dist. Sandy, OR 503-668-5541

Appendix C

2009 SFD Internal Survey - Communications Results Section Only

Respondent is:

- Well informed about activities at the District = 61% agree
- Well informed about goals and objectives set by District leadership and board = 51% disagree

Open communication is:

- Maintained to and from senior leadership (chief, deputy chief) and company officers (captains, lieutenants) = 43% agree, 34% disagree
- Maintained to and from respondent and immediate supervisor = 60% agree
- Respondent's opinion is important to leadership = 64% agree
- Member concerns/criticisms of District are responded to professionally = 66%
- 28% of respondents rely on other SFD members as a primary source of information about District activities

What the District should be doing more of (open-ended question):

- Follow-up/follow through with regard to questions, suggestions, and concerns
- Following chain of command for information and communication
- Involve all members (volunteers and personnel) in communication process.